

## Letter from Alexander Graham Bell to Mabel Hubbard Bell, June 28, 1888, with transcript

Letter from Dr. Alexander Graham Bell to Mrs. Alexander Graham Bell. (Gives Dr. Alexander Graham Bell's ideas as young woman re; Decollete Dress.) G.H.G. Alexandra Hotel, London. June 28th, 1888 My patient little wife:

You are very good to me, not one word of complaint for telegrams received in place of letters. It is astonishing how hard I find it to take up paper and pen.

I send you copy of "Facts and Opinions relating to the deaf" — a volume of 200 printed pages which will show you that I have not been idle. The whole thing was brought out in about one week. You can imagine that Mr. Hitz and I had to work hard, for nearly the whole material had to be copied for the printer, all excepting the extracts from printed reports. I was

(2–5 P.M. interrupted by a curious sound like an explosion in a large scale. Thought at first it was a clap of thunder, but there is no rain. Perhaps a dynamite outcrop? the people are running in the streets. I suppose we will find out by and by.)

I was up all night on two or three occasions. We had the proof of the part relating to "Intermarriages of the deaf" in the hands of the Commission, on the very first day — (Monday June 16th.) — and had the whole volume complete on the 2nd day (Thursday June 21st.) Third day was (Friday June 22nd) and last day was Tuesday June 26th.

That volume quite exhausted me and I think my 2nd days testimony shows it. However, my first days testimony had made a very great effect — and the 2nd day did not marr it enough to prevent them from wanting to hear me the 3rd day. At the conclusion of 3rd day, they felt there was still more to be obtained by cross-examination, and on 4th day

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they pumped me dry! and sent me to bed to recover from the operation. After Friday's examination I felt quite ill — old heart trouble back again — 2 spent Saturday in the open air at Norwood, much better after that, still I feel that I have overworked myself. I would be all right, were it not for that feeling at the heart that sometimes alarms me. Much worse when I am in bed than when I am up, especially in the morning. I think it just as well for me to rest here quietly till you return from Madrid. I am afraid of the heat of the South while I am in this condition. I want to see you all very, very much, but I must say I have no desire to make the acquaintance of "Sunny" France and still more Sunny Spain, at the present time. What I do long for is the heather covered hills of Scotland, and also the salt water of Baddeck. I am tired out, and what I would most enjoy would be to lie out among the heather on some Scottish hill, and stay there day and night, till you come to me!

The best thing for me to do now, I think, is to start upon the genealogical search, I want to make relating my own ancestry. First in regard to my mother's father, Dr. Samuel Symonds R.N. I have brought with me every scrap of evidence relating to him in possession of the family. I shall try to find a Mr. Waters, who has formerly undertaken genealogical researches for Americans relating to their English ancestry, and seek his advice, perhaps employ him. We must search the Admiralty Records and have copies of what they say. They will probably show where he obtained his medical education and we will look over collections of Royal College of Surgeons for his name. After exhausting records here, we must have Dover and Gosport Records searched, and after digesting the facts obtained, have records of Norwich searched for his father and mother and ancestors. I feel the best place would be to put the Symonds' matter into the hands of an expert, and then for me to take the Bell ancestry into my own hands and run up to St. Andrews where our family originated.

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The celebrated Andrew Bell of St. Andrews, founded there the Madras College, and left some fund to be employed in the education of boys of the surname “Bell” who could prove relationship to him.

If so — what does that mean? It means that they have at the Madras College, Bell genealogies . Certainly the families of that name in St. Andrews itself — will be found on paper there. If our family belongs to the Andrew Bell branch, we are there certainly. And if we do not belong to it, we shall surely still be there for the purpose of excluding the males of our branch from the benefits of the fund!

How is that?

I have hardly been outside the hotel since I came excepting to go to the printers or the office of Royal Commission, excepting to accept hospitality.

Sir Tindall Robertson, the blind member of parliament, invited me to dine with him in the House of Commons. He invited Sir William T, Marriott (Judge Advocate General) — and Admiral Field to meet me. He also gave me a pass for the distinguished strangers gallery; — and after I had been carefully scrutinized by an army of policemen I was admitted. I stayed for a little time and heard a vigorous attack upon the Government vigorously repelled. In the living room of the house, I saw many distinguished members. I asked Admiral Field whether Bradlaugh had been admitted to the House. He immediately introduced me to the gentleman sitting at my side, and said “This is Mr. Bradlaugh”!!! A more intellectual looking man than I had expected to see. I thought he was an uncultivated workingman — instead of this he is a very remarkable looking man — massive and Ingersollish in his general appearance, and with a remarkably intellectual appearance, high full forehead etc. He was just finishing 4 dinner at the table at which were seated, so I did not have much opportunity of speaking to him.

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After dinner — I was permitted — as the Blind member's friend, to enter a sanctuary to which strangers are rarely admitted, the members smoking room. (There is another smoking room for friends of members etc.) I was here introduced to Lord Grimsby (?) Mr. O'Sullivan and other members whose names I did not catch. Mr. Parnell sat on a sofa near looking very ill. My friends were all conservative, so of course I was not introduced to Parnell. A younger looking man than I thought. Pale as a corpse, pinched thin features. After seeing him I am inclined to believe the newspaper rumour that he is sinking under some fatal disease.

Mr. Chamberlain, heard that your father and I were in town and wrote to invite us both to dine with him. I was only able to answer for myself, and telegraphed your father as I did not know what your movements might be. I rather hoped that you might move nearer to London and perhaps come on here. You, rather unjustly, heaped coals of fire on poor Mr. Chamberlain's head, for what was only a courteous invitation to your father. He thought he was in London, the telegram was my own doing. I met quite a distinguished party of gentlemen at Mr. Chamberlain's. They were nearly all "Sirs" or "Lords" or titled men. I am sorry that I cannot remember the names for your benefit. Sir Lionel West from Washington was there, also Sir Charles Tapper from Canada. We had a very pleasant evening. The table was decorated with beautiful and rare orchids, I sat on Mr. Chamberlain's left hand. Altogether a pleasant evening. I remember name of one gentleman "Sir Henry Thompson." An untitled gentleman, Mr. Lucy, claimed acquaintance with me and enquired after you and Elsie. He wrote the little editorial in the Daily News 5 Which I sent you. He said that when he met us last he was a reporter for an English paper, and had been sent out to Canada, ahead of the Marquis of Lorne, to report fully the reception, the Marquis and his Royal bride. He crossed the Atlantic with us to Quebec when Elsie was a baby. He invited me to dine with him to meet some literary people, and I go there tonight.

Last night I attended the reception of Lady Egerton of Tutton, wife of Lord Egerton, Chairman of the Royal Commission, before which I have appeared.

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A brilliant display of diamonds and nakedness! I never saw so much of English ladies before! I did not realize until last night, the full enormity of the fashion here of low dresses and short sleeves. It struck me as simply indecent. These ladies too belonged all to the nobility of Great Britain, and it is surely their duty to set the people a better example of dress than they do. If such dress is suitable for any at all it might be suitable for the young. It simply disgusted me to see dowagers of mature years in such costume.

The Baroness Burdett-Contes was not dressed in this fashion. She enquired very kindly after you. If you could only be here, I think you would be invited into society here, although everything closes very soon. I have made no calls yet, but now intend to make a round of calls on those who showed us attention when we were in London in 1878.

It is probable that invitations may result. If you would care to join me in London, I will accept some of these invitations — if they come, if not I will not. Telegraph me what your plans are. I will join you anywhere you like after you return from Madrid. What I should prefer would be to meet you somewhere in France and take you up into Scotland. I don't want myself to stay in France or in any hot place 6 longer that I can help. I am just now far from well, and dread heat more than anything else. I don't want to cut your pleasure short, enjoy your European tour all you can. I am afraid you won't do it if I remain with you, I want to spend as long a time as I can in Scotland hunting up my ancestry, such an opportunity may not occur for years again. My experience in genealogic investigations will now help me wonderfully.

The best thing is this: — Let me know when you return from Madrid and I will run down to Biarritz or any where else you may appoint, so that we may arrange future movements after that. Let me go back to Scotland and spend the remainder of our time there. Come back with me if you feel you would enjoy the trip, if not stay on the continent, enjoying yourself as much as possible, and let me take my little Elsie or Daisy with me to Scotland.

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When you are ready to return to America, I will join you again. Much love to your dear Father and Mother. I long to see you all again. I received Daisy's letter, thank her for it. Love to Elsie and Daisy and Gipsy.

Your loving husband, Alec Mrs. A. Graham Bell Biarritz, France. P.S. Don't criticize letter too much, I am tired — so tired. Alec